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PROVIDENCE
and Its
Colonial Houses

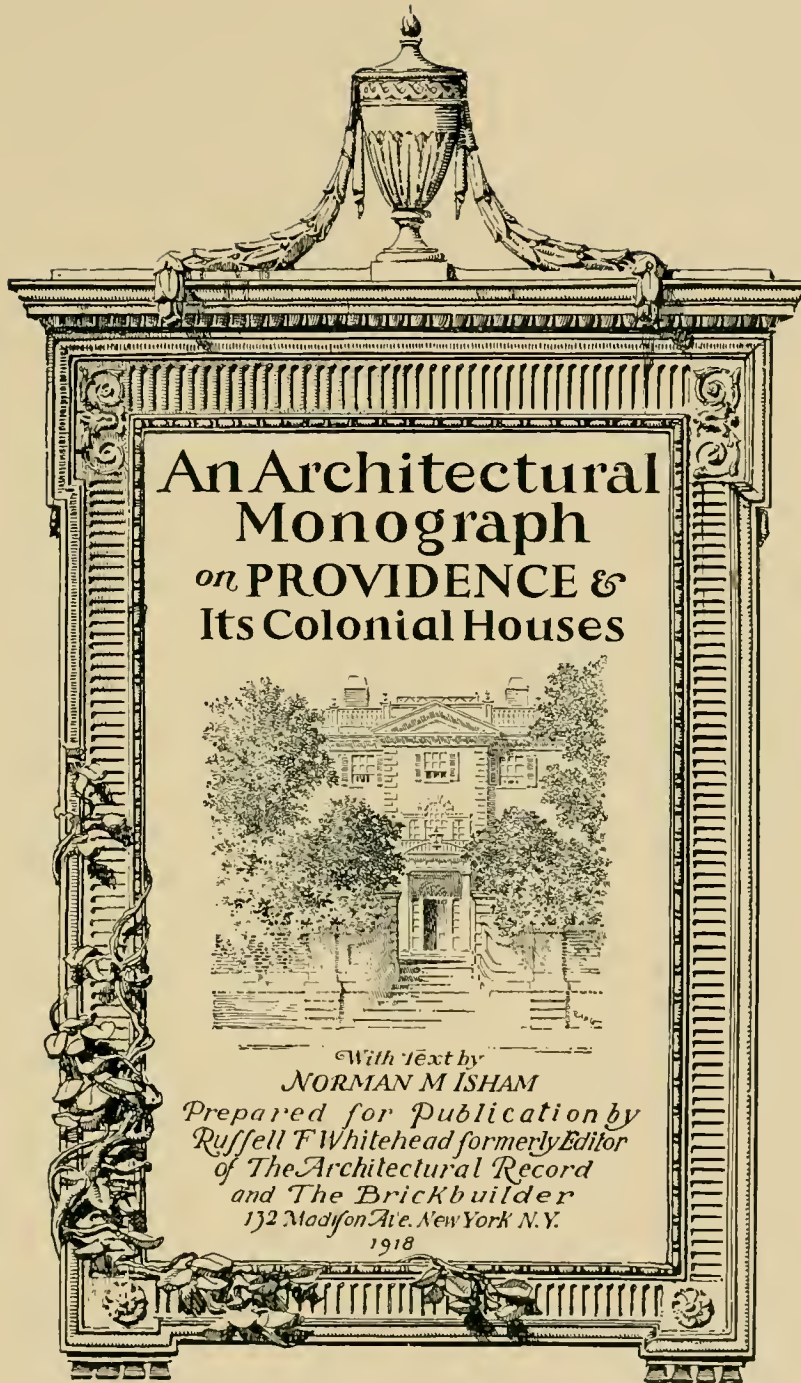
With Introductory Text by
Norman M Isham

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An Architectural
Monograph
on PROVIDENCE &
Its Colonial Houses



With Text by
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Prepared for Publication by
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COLONEL JOSEPH NIGHTINGALE HOUSE.

Detail of Front.

1792.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

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No. 3

PROVIDENCE AND ITS COLONIAL HOUSES

By NORMAN MORRISON ISHAM, F. A. I. A.

Other contributions to the literature of Colonial architecture by Mr. Isham include, "Early Rhode Island Houses," "The Homeric Palace," etc. He has practiced architecture in Providence since 1892 and has been instructor in architecture in Brown University and head of the architectural department of the Rhode Island School of Design.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIAN A. BUCKLY

NEARLY every man and boy in eighteenth-century Rhode Island turned, early or late, to blue water. Sailor or fisherman, sea captain or merchant, they all drew their living or their wealth from the ocean, and even the great cotton spinning industry of the early nineteenth century was sustained, in its beginnings, by fortunes made on the sea.

The wealth which this traffic brought to all the older ports of the Colonies was reflected in their building, and Providence, as a busy harbor, has a heritage of Colonial houses which, if it is not so well known as that of Salem or Portsmouth—indeed, it is scarcely known at all outside of Rhode Island itself and imperfectly there—may still claim to rival that of the others and, in some ways, to surpass it.

The town was settled on the slope of a high, steep hill, and at the foot of the hill a straggling street, following the shore of the river. This, the present North and South Main Street, still exists. Here stood the houses of the early town, with one room only, or with two rooms side by side and a great stone chimney at the end of the building toward the hill. A dwelling of this kind still forms a part of the eastern end of the Pidge house, on North Main Street, the end at the right of the front door.

Across the river was a narrow neck of land, quite marshy, even an island at some stages of the tide, along which went the Indian trail to the Narragansett and the Pequot countries.

There were no houses on this western bank till the opening of the eighteenth century, when

the quaint cottages of the preceding age of farmers began to give way, from age, fire and change of fashion, to the finer, more classic dwellings of the now predominant trading class.

One of the survivors of these early dwellings of the newer type is the Christopher Arnold house, on South Main Street, built about 1735. It has a central chimney against which the stairs in the narrow entry are placed. There is a room on each side of this entry, while behind the chimney is the kitchen with a smaller room at each end. The doorway is the oldest in Providence, as, indeed, the house is the oldest now standing on the "Towne Street." The almost Jacobean character of the rosette and the flower on its stalk was probably carried over from the carving on the older furniture. The overhang in the gable is noticeable. This may have been brought about in the same way as the similar overhang in the house which once stood next to this on the north—by building up on the end cornices of a hip-roofed house. That is to say, Providence once had its quota of the hip roofs of the early part of the century, like those still to be seen in Portsmouth and in Newport.

Another house of about 1740, also with a gable overhang, is the Crawford, further north, on the opposite or east side of the street. This has a very remarkable door with large, bent-over leaves above the caps of its pilasters, and the curious bending up of the back band in the middle of the lintel, a characteristic of early work which seems to be a reminiscence of the school of Sir Christopher Wren. Doors like this are rare.

The only other I know is in Hadley. They are derived from some of the bracketed English forms.

The central chimney plan which has just been described remained in fashion almost up to the Greek Revival, though the houses grew larger, lost their quaintness and acquired more dignity. Dwellings of the type were built even after 1800. The plan was no longer the tip of the fashion, however. The second quarter of the century, especially the years just before 1750, and, of course, even more the years just before the Revolution, when the money from privateering in the Old French War was flowing into the town, saw the rise and spread here, as in the rest of New England, of the central-entry type of plan—that in which a long hall runs through the



CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD HOUSE.
South Main Street.
Circa 1735.

house from front to back, with two rooms on each side. Most of the houses of this kind in Providence are of brick; the wooden house of early date on that plan is not common. At any rate, it has not survived in any numbers. It is to be seen in its glory, for Rhode Island, in Newport and not in Providence. The great house at the corner of North Main Street and Branch Avenue may be of this date, as may the Olney tavern at the corner of

Olney Street, once Olney's Lane; but, as a rule, the houses seem simply to have been a larger and finer grade of the central-chimney scheme, with more elaborate interior woodwork which is often very excellent.

There was little building in Providence during the Revolution—there was too much distress



PIDGE HOUSE.
North Main Street (Pawtucket Avenue), View from Southwest.
East End, circa 1700; West End, circa 1745.

in the community for that. The British were at Newport a large part of the time, and the whole colony was an armed camp. When once the struggle was over the town came into a period of great prosperity. Before the war it had been the smaller place, Newport the larger and more important as well as the more wealthy. Now the British occupation had ruined Newport and Providence forged ahead. The earlier trade, which had provided the wherewithal to build houses like the Crawford and the Arnold, was with the West Indies. Now the East Indies were levied upon, and the trade with them and China employed a fleet of ships and enriched many merchants, some of whom succeeded in



Detail of Doorway.
CRAWFORD HOUSE, SOUTH MAIN STREET.
Circa 1740.

holding what they acquired in this lucrative traffic while others had the opportunity of musing on the fickleness of fortune.

The houses of this time are often three stories in height, though two is still the common number, and after 1815 the three-story house is rarely built. The rooms are much larger and higher in the greater three-deckers, and in all dwellings the distance "between joints" increases considerably. There is generally a garden door on one

side, sometimes with a porch, and the projecting porch on the front comes into fashion. Sometimes the porch has tall columns, and the piazza with the same "colossal orders" is not unknown.

About 1800—earlier in brick houses—a new



CAPTAIN GEORGE BENSON HOUSE.
North Side of Angell Street. Now the Grosvenor House.
Circa 1786.



BURROUGH HOUSE.
North Side of Power Street.
Circa 1820.



BOSWORTH HOUSE.
East Side of Cooke Street.
Circa 1820.

arrangement appears in the plan. The central-entry type just described had generally only two chimneys, one between the two rooms of the pair on each side of the entry, or hall, as we should call it. The new plan put a chimney in the outer wall of each room. This brought the fireplace nearly opposite the entrance to the room from the hall and left two walls free of windows and even of doors for the furniture. These houses are often three stories high, but the majority are of two stories.

The finest wooden specimen of the great

Colonies, a great credit to its unknown designer, stands on a lot a little to the north of that on which John Jones Clark, the other partner in the firm of Clark and Nightingale, had already built a large three-story house, long ago destroyed by fire. It was the last word in monumental housework in its day. It marks the end of a period, too, for almost everything that comes after it is lighter in detail and presents no such appearance of weight and character as this.

The house has a fine front porch with the



JASON WILLIAMS-CROUCH HOUSE.

North Side of George Street.
Circa 1800.

three-storied mansion with the central entry and interior chimneys is the house which Colonel Joseph Nightingale built in 1792 (frontispiece and illustration on page eight) on the east side of the new thoroughfare, called Benefit Street, which ran along parallel to the Main Street about half way up the hill, and which received its name because it was to be a great relief to the congested old village on the waterside. If the street is crooked it is because it had to respect the old family burial grounds—one of them still exists—which lay in its path.

This magnificent dwelling, the best wooden house in Providence and one of the best in the

usual brown-stone steps and platform, all in front of a central mass which projects slightly from the main body of the façade. The door has a toplight and sidelights, one of the earliest instances of the use of them. Over the porch is a Palladian window, while the window over this again, in the third story, is plain like the others on that floor. Above the cornice of the projecting central motive is a pediment the tympanum of which is filled with glass. There are heavy bevelled quoins at the corners, and the windows have them also, with rusticated voussoirs in their flat arches above which are moulded cor-

(Text continued on page 10)



COLONEL JOSEPH NIGHTINGALE HOUSE.
East Side of Benefit Street. Later owned by John Carter
Brown, one of whose descendants still possesses it
1792.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A SECTION DEVOTED TO THE PROBLEMS
OF THE RETAIL DEALER IN LUMBER

DISCRIMINATION IN THE USE OF LUMBER THE ONE THING NECESSARY TO INSURE PERMANENCY IN BUILDING

By ROBERT STARRS

District Representative, Weyerhaeuser Sales Company, Chicago, Illinois

BEING confined to limited space, I must perforce hurry along to my point and must try to keep to it; hence, luckily for the reader of this article, he may be spared any little wanderings in which I might otherwise be tempted to indulge.

My plea is for the proper use of Lumber. The necessity for such a plea should not exist. Nevertheless, it does, and it does to a much more marked degree than is generally realized.

Timber is Nature's gift to man to fill his many needs in the use of lumber, and while we must take the tree as it grows, yet the experience of the ages shows that in the economy of the world there is vital and pressing need of the whole product—both Heart and Sap pieces. But consumers should be careful to discriminate between the two varieties.

Sound heart-wood exposed to the weather will stand the test of time to the maximum of satisfaction. On the other hand, the softer or sap piece has not the wearing quality nor will it hold out satisfactorily in outside places. It is evident, therefore, that reasonable care should be taken in selecting for porches, or for any other outside finish, lumber free from sap if one is building for permanency.

This rule will also hold good in selecting your outside doors and window sash, but for inside doors and inside finish you can count on sap-wood's being entirely suitable. In such places this variety will last almost to the end of time. Individual taste, therefore, will be the only guide needed in the selection of inside finish.

For floor lining and sheathing and roof boards

almost any low-grade board or strip will be satisfactory, even though showing stained sap or other coarse defects. But see that you get soundness and the necessary strength in your joist, studding, and sills; and for such floors as are not to be covered by linoleum or carpet or rug insist on getting Edge Grain stock.

These suggestions, if carried out, will spell Permanency in the building of your home, and the moderate-priced home, if it is to be artistic and homelike, must be built of wood.

Let me, confidently, ask the Retailer and the Carpenter to help carry out the idea of the RIGHTFUL USE OF LUMBER. To be sure, you will lose very considerably on repair jobs, but the increase in new buildings, which may reasonably be expected from this procedure, can be relied on to more than make up for your losses on this score—the satisfaction

of a well built home being the best recommendation lumber can have.

Almost any variety of wood can be economically used for temporary work, but for permanent construction I would make a special plea to THE MAN IN CHARGE for the use of heart-wood where lasting service is wanted. Do not let sap pieces, on any pretext whatever, find their way into your bridge planking or your railroad station platforms, if you are planning either for economy or for permanency. And I am satisfied that both of these results are what you are aiming at.

USE LUMBER, BUT USE IT WITH DISCRIMINATION.



ROBERT STARRS

BUSINESS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTIONS FOR DEALERS WHO GO AFTER IT

By LOUIS GRILK

Western Manager, The George L. Dyer Company of New York

AMERICAN business is face to face with new conditions. There never have been such "times" as these. The slogan, "Business as usual," was all right to bolster up our courage for a little while; but every thinking merchant knows that under present conditions business cannot be "as usual."

We are, all of us, first of all, citizens of the United States, with obligations to our government. We must make our business contribute the utmost possible to the common good. And by careful study almost every business dealing with fundamental necessities can find some way of serving—the retail lumber dealer along with the rest.

Especially is this true of the retail lumber dealer in the agricultural sections of the country. Not until we were called upon to make good the food deficit of the Allies did we fully realize the profligate waste—the thoughtless inefficiency—on the American farm.

There were inadequate facilities for storing grain. Implements were allowed to rust and deteriorate in the open. Stock was carelessly housed, with no thought for the amount of feed that did nothing but generate animal heat to counteract the lack of proper protection from the weather. Hogs were given even less consideration. Poultry was forced to shift for itself.

An exaggerated statement, you may say. True, if you apply all the charges to one farm. But there is scarcely a single farm in the land that has not been guilty of one or more of the charges. The most convincing proof lies in the fact that wherever the conditions have been pointed out to farmers, they have been quick to correct them. The farmer realizes that new standards of efficiency must be applied to his business as well as to every other business. He knows that *every bushel of grain* counts—that *every pound of meat* is essential—that *every piece of steel* he saves in properly caring for his machinery goes into a gun or shell to help win the war.

It therefore becomes the *duty* of the retail lumber dealers to keep these facts constantly before the farmer, and to be prepared to coöperate with the farmer in giving him adequate farm buildings.

It was with this thought in mind that the White Pine Bureau prepared its "1918 BIGGER BUSINESS SERVICE." That it was the kind of merchandising needed to meet the situation is already apparent from the letters that are daily coming to the Bureau from the dealers who are using it. Where the campaigns were started early, they had a marked effect on spring building.

The time to go after the summer and fall building is now. Keep hammering away week after week in your newspaper advertising; use your envelope enclosures; and if you are not busy at the yard go out among the farmers and talk building with them.

Business for the retail lumber dealer in a farming community rests entirely with the dealer. If he'll "go out after it" he'll get it; if he waits for it to come to him on a silver platter, most likely he'll wait. All over the world the old struggle of the survival of the fittest is going on on a scale never before imagined—in business as well as in war. In business the "go-getters" are going to be the survivors. And the dealer who enlists in the fight to eliminate needless waste and inefficiency on the farm need have no fear that his neighbor or his conscience will accuse him of being a profiteer.

To keep up to date on what their fellow dealers are doing—more than fourteen hundred dealers are now using "1918 BIGGER BUSINESS SERVICE." If you haven't climbed aboard, it isn't too late. Write the White Pine Bureau to-day.



EDWARD DEXTER HOUSE.

North Side of Waterman Street. Now owned by Dr. Day.

Circa 1799.

nices. The main cornice is very well profiled and is in good proportion to the whole height. Even the fronts of the Palladian modillions are carved.

The roof is hipped, as is the case with all the houses of this type, and is surmounted by a small curb which is roofed with gables, of which that in the front, at least, has a glazed tympanum. The balustrade of the main roof has regular balusters with top and bottom rails and posts capped with well-shaped urns. The upper roof has a balustrade of Chinese pattern; that is, with plain sticks between the rails, intersecting in a pattern.

The house was originally square with three rooms on the north side of the entry. The additions on the south are later. There was probably a garden door here as there was in the Clark house, perhaps with a porch, too, as Clark had.

Another firm of merchants was Snow and Munro. Snow had a town house which stood on Westminster Street, but which is now removed to a much less dignified street behind its old location and has become a store-house after enjoying the high estate of a laundry. It is still an imposing wreck, although raised in the air and shorn of its front door, its chimneys and its balustrades.

An even more interesting house was that which Snow built for his country home, out on the Cranston road, about two miles from the Great Bridge, from which all distances were reckoned in Providence. This had very light detail, with tall slim columns for its front porch, which was of the whole height of the house, and others, equally tall, for the piazzas, of which there was one on each side of the building. It fell into disuse and was pulled down some years ago.

To go back a little, when Captain George Benson retired from the firm of Brown, Benson and Ives, he built the house which still stands at the top of the hill on the north side of Angell Street and which ranks among the two-story houses of the town at the end of the eighteenth century as its contemporary, the Nightingale, does among those of three stories. Here is the porch on its brown-stone platform, and here is the garden door also. The influence of the steep hill on the treatment of Providence houses is well illustrated, too. We shall see it again, later, in the Dorr house (illustrated at top of page fifteen). The balustrade on this roof is of the regular

baluster type, a characteristic of all these larger houses.

Another Providence merchant, Edward Dexter, built on George Street the house now on Waterman Street, owned by Dr. Day. The building was sawed in two and each half moved up the hill, separately, to the present location, where they were reunited. Any one who is skeptical—the moving took place within the memory of men now living—may see the saw-cut in the entablature of the porch.

In this house, built in 1799, we find pilasters used to support the gable at the cornice level in the center of the façade, a treatment of which there is but one other example in Providence. The corners of the house have the ordinary quoins. The windows are surmounted each by an entablature and pediment. The balustrade here differs from those previously described in having alternate blocks of balusters and solid panels. The balusters come over the windows, the panels over the piers.

It will be noted that the house is of the exterior chimney type—that is, the fireplaces are on the outer walls of the rooms—with the usual rather flat hip roof. One cannot help seeing, too, the delicacy of the detail, the lightness of it all as compared with that of the Benson house.

Another four-room exterior-chimney house, of somewhat simpler type, is the Diman house on Angell Street, built by Ebenezer Knight Dexter in 1800 or 1801. The sun parlor and the porch are, of course, modern. The old doorway had been removed, and that now in place was taken from a beautiful summer house which once stood in the old garden.

Of the simpler dwellings one very interesting example is the Bosworth house on Cooke Street, a straightforward solution of its problem, with excellent proportions and quiet detail, much of which is concentrated upon the doorway, which, with its rusticated elliptical arch and jambs, is a recognized type among Providence entrances.

An even simpler house standing on Power Street, very near the Bosworth, is the Burrough house, with its monitor roof and still another type of doorway quite common about 1820.

These Providence doors are sometimes criticized as too much alike, because we do not have here the elaborate late porches of Salem. Porches, it is true, are not common here. They



HOUSE ON SOUTH STREET.

View from Northwest
Circa 1810



PADELORD HOUSE.

South Side of Benevolent Street.
Circa 1815.



Doorway.
HOUSE ON CHESTNUT STREET,
Providence, Rhode Island.

exist, as the photographs of this article show, but they are few in number. The reproach, however, comes from lack of observation. There are many types of doorway, all interesting, and the different examples of each type vary more than might be supposed.

There are doors without the orders, though they are not common. The Williams-Crouch house has almost the only really classical one, and that is not early. It has merely the architrave, with crossettes, the frieze and pediment, but these elements are very simply and beautifully combined.

Then there are the doors with the orders—columns or pilasters. The oldest of these—it is one of the oldest in the Colonies—is that in the Arnold house. I know of nothing just like it, though a leaf and rosette of the same type occur in the interior of a house in southern Rhode Island. This type ruled till after 1800 and lingered in a modified form till 1820 or 1825. The early examples have an entablature above the lintel, with or without a pediment. Generally the order has a pedestal with a panel the top of which is curved. As a rule, there are glazed lights immediately over the door and these were sometimes of bull's-eye glass—that is, were cut from the centers of crown glass sheets. A door at the top of Constitution Hill had these

—the last specimens in Providence—till a fire destroyed them a few years ago. The back band of the architrave is, in these oldest doors, turned up in the center of the frieze. Later the frieze follows Palladio and takes the cushion form.

After a time the round toplight with fan tracery comes into use, and the entablature is done away with over the door opening, while it remains above the columns or pilasters, and the arch is thus allowed to come up into what would be the tympanum. This entablature over the pilaster is sometimes very elaborate, as in the two instances on Arnold Street.

Another doorway, on the same street, has brackets over its narrow panelled pilasters. Over all is the usual entablature and pediment. There is one doorway similar to this on Arnold Street, and one on North Main, but neither is as good. These seem to be the only examples of a rare and very interesting type.

On the corner of Benefit and Bowen streets stands the house built by Sullivan Dorr in 1810 or 1811, and now owned by Mrs. Sayles. (Illustrated at top of page fifteen.) It varies somewhat even from the late line of Colonial work



Doorway.
CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD HOUSE.
South Main Street,
Providence, Rhode Island.
(Illustration of full elevation at top of page four)



Doorway and Tracery.
DODGE HOUSE, GEORGE STREET
Providence, Rhode Island.

which we have been following, but, perhaps for that very reason, it is of great interest.

The house consisted, originally, of a main block which had a central motive and two short wings. The present addition to this is readily discerned in the photograph. Attached to one side of this main body was an ell to which, in turn, were joined the sheds and, further on, at right angles, the stable and carriage house.

As the block faced south the length lay east and west, that is, against the slope of the hill. The problem was to adjust the various parts of the house and its dependencies to the rather steep grade. This was done with great skill. The house was set well above the street and a high wall of cut granite, pierced by a flight of steps at the gate and crowned by a wooden fence, was built to retain the level of the garden terrace in front of the main part of the building. The floor of the main house and that of the ell are on the same level, but the underpinning of the house is high, while that of the ell is very low, so that the courtyard level is above that of the garden and is reached by a flight of steps through the fence which separates the two. The hill was cut away to allow this court to extend as well as to gain a place for the stable group, which is backed up against the slope, so that its second story is but little above the ground on the uphill side.

The porch of the house is very striking, with its clustered columns made to represent Gothic piers and the delicate cusped work in the architrave. Equally interesting—indeed, more so—is the translation of the staid Palladian window into terms of clustered columns and cusped ornament. The effect on the whole is excellent, a commentary on what good proportion will do for a design.

The coves in the cornice are of composition, highly ornamented with an incised pattern. The balustrade, too, is worked out in a manner which is different from the ordinary and which accords with the house. The centerpiece cannot be original.

In all these houses we can see that the standard of workmanship was very high in Providence; as it was, indeed, in all Rhode Island. The details, too, are generally very correct and well designed. There is evidence all through the work in the city that skilful and painstaking workmen wrought upon the building of its homes. What they have left behind them ranks high in the architecture of the old Thirteen Colonies.



Doorway.
SOUTH SIDE OF ARNOLD STREET.
Circa 1800.
Providence, Rhode Island.



EBENEZER KNIGHT DEXTER HOUSE.
North Side of Angell Street. Now the Diman House.
Circa 1800.



SULLIVAN DORR HOUSE, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND.

Circa 1810.

GROWTH AND SERVICE

By A. I. KELLOGG

Mr. Kellogg may, perhaps, be called the Dean of White Pine Salesmen. In his association with White Pine as the District Representative, Weyerhaeuser Sales Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mr. Kellogg receives daily evidence of the service this remarkable wood is rendering. As a result, White Pine lumber has, very evidently, won his high regard and real affection.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

THE object of life is growth; the purpose of life is service. The character and quality of a service rendered are the measure of its value. Both growth and service are inseparable expressions of the Law of Life and demonstrate the perfect coöperation of the forces operating in obedience to the command of Him who made.

Growth is that expression of the Law of Life controlling or governing the expanding physical development of every living organism, forcing it toward, or into, that state, or condition, of physical maturity qualifying it to render the definite, specific service it was created to perform in protecting, sustaining and maintaining human life. It is nature's means to an end,—the end being the uses of service.

Service is fulfilment of the Law of Life expressed in the action of use. It is that conform-

ity to the established order which, impelling man to action through the factor of need, has made possible the intellectual growth and progress of the human race since it began approaching its ultimate objective,—an objective foreseen of the Great Architect when He gave man dominion over all things and decreed that: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

In exercising his privilege of dominion, man has gathered experience, accumulated knowledge, overcome the obstacles in the path of his progress, discovered the uses to which each organism is best adapted, utilized the contents of nature's storehouse, developed processes for their conversion into commodities useful to man; established methods and practice; evolved a mighty system of trade and commerce and multiplied his opportunities and powers to serve the peoples of earth. And in the doing of all these works man has,

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